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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SEVEN U.S. COMPANIES BID FOR NATIONAL ID CARD PROJECT

REF: CARRIG-WALKER EMAIL 6/25/01

1. (U) Summary. Seven U.S. companies, in two separate consortia, made oral presentations for a USD 200 million national identification card project on June 28. The actual presentation of bid proposals appeared to be open and transparent, with a total of four consortia competing for the bid. However, it is alleged that the French government may be placing intense pressure on the GON to choose the French consortium. End Summary.

2. On June 28, Ambassador Jeter and EconOffs attended the oral presentations of seven U.S. companies (in two consortia) in their bid for the national identification card project, worth approximately USD 200 million. All four consortia presented their proposals in front of a wide audience of GON officials and interested diplomatic representatives. GON officials included President Obasanjo, Vice President Abubakar, the Minister, Deputy Minister, and Permanent Secretary for Internal Affairs, Chief of the Independent

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National Electoral Commission, and Senate Chairman of the Committee on National Identification Cards. Post was encouraged by the open and transparent manner in which the bidding process was conducted, and the lively questioning that ensued following the presentations.

3. Per Ref email, DOC earlier had advised Ambassador Jeter to represent Datacard and Polaroid, as the only U.S. concerns for the project, at the June 28 presentation. To demonstrate USG support for Datacard's bid, Ambassador Jeter prepared a letter to Vice President Abubakar on behalf of the company. However, the letter went undelivered because the Ambassador discovered, after arriving at the presentation venue, that there were in fact five other U.S. companies bidding for the project as partners in the Mint/Crest consortium. These companies are East Shore Technologies, NCS Pearson, Omicron, Oracle, and IBM.

4. President Obasanjo commented, as an aside, that only three of the four consortia are competitive: Crest/Mint, Chams (Datacard and Polaroid), and a consortium of French companies. The Government of France (GOF) appears to be very active in promoting its companies in the tendering process. During the course of the presentations, several of the U.S. companies commented to Ambassador Jeter that the GOF was putting significant pressure on the GON on behalf of the French consortium. For example, one company representative suggested that the French government had offered bilateral debt cancellation in exchange for award of the contract. Moreover, the French Foreign Minister arrived in Abuja that same evening on a long scheduled visit, and upon arrival would undoubtedly be in a position to pressure the GON to accept the French bid.

5. Comment. Unfortunately, Post was not informed in advance of five of the seven U.S. companies bidding for the national ID project and, therefore, the Ambassador was unable to provide a specific endorsement of any one or combination of U.S. companies. As it turned out, Ambassador Jeter who sat just left of President Obasanjo, felt compelled to stay for all of the U.S. companies' presentations, a total of about seven hours. In his statement, Ambassador Jeter said that all of the U.S. companies represented were eminently qualified for this project and expressed the hope that there would be American participation. The companies present seemed satisfied with the approach and expressed deep gratitude for an Embassy presence.

6. Comment Continued: Post is encouraged by President Obasanjo's efforts to make the bidding process open and transparent for this high profile national project (one dogged, unfortunately, with extensive allegations of waste and corruption for years). The tendering process, at least at this semi-public event, appears to have been on a level playing field. A Statehouse official told the Ambassador on June 29 that President Obasanjo and his team will take a few

weeks to assess their findings and impressions and will make an announcement of their decision at such time. End Comment.  
Jeter